DAWN

METRO South

KARACHI Wednesday, January 21, 2026

KARACHI

Sunset	06:09pm
Sunrise (Tomorrow)	07:16am

NEXT 24 HRS

Minimum	14°C
Maximum	26°C
Humidity	61%
Outlook	Sunny

Kostoulas stunner saves Brighton against Bournemouth

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Opposition to hold protest at Gul Plaza against govt 'negligence'

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Opposition parties along with representatives of multiple political parties, traders' associations and victims of the Gul Plaza fire on Tuesday announced a peaceful protest after Friday prayers (Jan 23) outside the destroyed business centre to condemn "criminal negligence of the government, poor fire safety measures and lack of support for the victims' families".

The announcement was made at a joint press conference held outside Gul Plaza, hosted by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf.

Those who addressed the press conference included PTI Sindh president Haleem Adil Sheikh, senior leader Firdous Shamim Naqvi, Grand Democratic Alliance leaders Dr Safdar Abbasi and Sardar Abdul Rahim, Sindh United Party's Advocate Naveed Ahmed as well as representatives of the Shia Ulema Council, Sunni Tehreek, Balochistan Awami Party and JUI (Sherani faction).

During the press conference, participants released a joint declaration titled "Gul Plaza Tragedy, Karachi," criticising failures in governance, fire safety, emergency response, and municipal preparedness. The declaration praised firefighters and rescue personnel for their bravery despite severe shortages of equipment, calling them national heroes rather than culprits.

They highlighted widespread non-compliance with fire safety laws, lack of protective equipment, weak coordination at

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Centre promises all-out support to fire victims: Page 14

Firefighters left to face the flames and the blame

• By the time fire tenders reached the site, a massive crowd of people had already gathered there, turning panic and worry into a physical obstacle • Death toll reaches 28; dozens still missing

By Shazia Hasan

KARACHI: Zafar Khan, a fire officer, has not moved far from the front of Gul Plaza since the night of Jan 17, when the iconic building caught fire. The raging blaze has claimed 28 lives so far, while rescue teams continue to search for more than 60 missing people.

Days later, with smoke still seeping from the building, Khan could be seen standing amid charred debris and angry murmurs, explaining again and again why it had been such an uphill task to douse the fire.

Where plastic or similarly inflammable material is present, he says, fire has a habit of re-erupting the moment it receives oxygen. "That is why, even now, firefighting and cooling continue side by side."

When asked how he copes with public accusations of "incompetence" and "undue delays", he barely pauses. "We are here to save people's lives and property. It is part of our training not to get too emotional as we focus on our work while being confronted by people who are freaking out. We understand that ours is also a thankless job. People also yell at and curse doctors in hospitals who are caring for their loved ones."

The Gul Plaza inferno and its aftermath have given rise to a storm of allegations, with the first finger pointed squarely at the firefighters.

Citizens, angered, frustrated and left helpless by the tragedy, accused the fire crew of arriving late, running out of water, lacking equipment and skill, and failing to control a fire that broke out around 10:15pm on Saturday but continued to smoulder until Tuesday evening.

Smoke billowing from the building's eastern side fuelled public suspicion that something inside was still burning, but firefighters had left it "unchecked".

Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's Chief Fire Officer, Humayun Khan, however, explains his crew's side of the story, one that rarely surfaces or makes news.

"We responded to the distress call about the fire at Gul Plaza almost immediately and reported here within 10 to 12 minutes of receiving that call," he tells *Dawn*.

RESCUE workers and firefighters working inside the still-smouldering Gul Plaza, pause to catch their breath on a window sill.—Shakil Adil / White Star

By the time fire tenders reached the site, however, a crowd of 10,000 to 12,000 people had gathered at the site, turning panic into a physical obstacle. "Yes, we understand their anxiety, but coming in our way in their panic is not right. In fact, it is a violation," he adds.

He further explains how each distress call made to the helpline is digitally registered with the caller's ID, followed by a confirmation call, a process which leaves little room for dispute over response time.

"There is a need to keep ambulance routes separate," the fire chief says. "Ignoring such Standard Operating Procedures [SOPs] can make even small incidents big."

What puzzled him most was that many shopkeepers decided to stay inside the burning building instead of running outside immediately.

Even after 12 fire tenders and three snorkels were deployed, he recalls, his crews had to struggle to manoeuvre hoses amid pressure from shopowners, which created a lot of confusion. "Still, we were able to help the shopkeepers grab their valuable documents that were left behind, along with cash worth millions," he shares.

According to members of the fire crew, people also questioned them about their tactics. Would foam or chemical agents not have been more effective against a fire that kept flaring up?

Officer Zafar agrees in principle, but said that there were limitations.

"Foam needs to reach the precise area, which we were unable to reach in this case. It is ineffective if sprayed from afar," he explains.

When asked why all firefighters were also seen wearing plain disposable masks and not specialised ones or helmets with torches, Fire Chief Humayun quickly shook his head.

"We are not short of such equipment," he says. But we use them when needed. The fumes carry particles that choke the gas masks. Putting them on to take off again and go back to have them cleaned will take too much time. Besides, we wore disposable masks and plain helmets when firefighting from outside. We will use whatever is needed after going inside. We have already started doing that now, as the fire is more or less under control. We are just waiting for the building to cool.

It is also a structure in danger of collapsing, he says, explaining, "We also need to be careful as we have already lost one firefighter when a portion of the building fell on him."

The martyred fireman, Furqan Ali, 36, was associated with the Nazimabad Fire Station and had been serving in the KMC Fire Department since 2018. He was appointed on a deceased quota after his father, also associated with the fire department, passed away while in service.

'Systemic failure'

For those on the ground, the deeper problem lies far beyond a single blaze. According to Sub-Fire Officer Sajid Ali Khan, the commercial complex, which was spread over nearly two acres of land, had not a single fire hose

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Sindh approves new grading system for matric, inter exams

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: In light of the Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) policy directives, the Sindh government has abolished the marks system in all educational boards of the province and approved a new grading system for matriculation and intermediate examinations, announced Sindh Minister for Universities and Boards Ismail Rahoo on Tuesday.

Under the new system, students scoring less than 40 per cent will be considered failed.

From now on, students' performance will be categorised into the following grades instead of marks: A++: 96 per cent-100pc; A+: 91pc-95pc; -A: 86pc-90pc; B++: 81pc-85pc; B+: 76pc-80pc; B: 71pc-75pc; C+: 61pc-70pc; C: 51pc-60pc; D: 40pc-50pc (Emerging); U: Below 40pc (Fail/ Undergraded).

The minister explained that the new grading system would be implemented across the province in phases. Starting in 2026, it will be applied to the first annual examinations of class nine and class 11 (SSC-I / HSSC-I).

According to the provincial minister, in 2027 the system will also apply to the annual examinations of class 10 and class 12 (SSC-II / HSSC-II).

He said any student who scores below 40pc in any paper will be declared 'U', amd would be given the opportunity to reappear in the same paper to improve their performance.

The purpose of this system is to bring uniformity across all educational boards in the country, he added. Once the system is fully implemented in all boards, a Grade Point Average (GPA) system will also be introduced in the future.

Robbers loot Rs6.2m, kill passer-by in New Town

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Robbers killed a passer-by and looted Rs6.2 million from a man on University Road within the remit of the New Town police station on Tuesday, police said.

They said that a citizen drew cash from a bank in Clifton and reached a showroom near Jail Chowrangi to make payment for a car when armed robbers held him at gunpoint and demanded the money.

The officials said when the citizen put up resistance the robbers started firing and fled with the looted cash. However, a passer-by suffered a critical bullet wound in the chest and was taken to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre where doctors pronounced him dead on arrival. He was identified as 25-year-old Waqar Ahmed.

East-SSP Zubair Nazir Ahmed Shaikh said in a statement that the passer-by suffered bullet wounds when the citizen and robbers exchanged fire. He said initial investigation suggested that Waqar was killed in the firing by robbers.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Ziaul Hasan Lanjar and Inspector General of Police Javed Alam Odho took notice of the Rs6.2m robbery and the killing of the citizen and ordered immediate arrest of those involved.

What Gul Plaza really meant to Karachiites

The objects purchased from Gul Plaza will eventually break, or quietly disappear into storage, but what will remain is the memory of where they came from; a rare market where affordability and variety converged

By Aniqa Atiq Khan

KARACHI: Gul Plaza only announced its importance after it was gone. The lamp on my bedside table , the wall clock ticking opposite me, the bedsheet folded at the foot of my bed, and the ceramic tray holding loose change on my desk — all were purchased from the ill-fated shopping mall.

I hadn't noticed just how much of my living space traces back to that same address in Karachi's historic mall — until it was gone.

Each object carries has own story: a practical purchase the first time we moved house, an impulsive buy after a long walk through crowded aisles, or something my mother spotted on her many trips there. At the time, none of it felt momentous. These were low-stakes decisions made between bargaining and staircases.

The objects we purchased from Gul Plaza will eventually break, fade, or quietly disappear into storage. But what will inevitably remain is the memory of where they came from.

This isn't just one person's story. It is the case for most Karachiites, across class and generations, for whom Gul Plaza simply existed in the background as they put together their homes and lives, one item (sometimes remarkable, sometimes gloriously ordinary) at a time.

Wedding shopping, particularly, was inseparable from Gul Plaza. Taniya Awan recalled how when she was getting married, her parents went there for her *jahez* which included kitchenware, blankets, bedsheets, and home appliances. Years later, she returned not for herself, but for her son, Azhaan.

"When Azhaan turned five, he wanted a bicycle so I bought him one from Gul Plaza. At seven, he wanted an electric bike and I bought it from there too. In a way, it was a part of the timeline of his childhood."

That sense of continuity, of returning to the same place at different stages of life, came up again and again. Ujala Nadeem described Gul Plaza as "a quiet witness to time passing." She visited first as a child with her grandmother, later as a working adult with her father, and then as a newly married woman, designing a home of her own.

"When I received my first paycheck, I could only think of going to Gul Plaza for a shopping haul," she said, recalling the pride of buying a rug from the basement with her own earnings. "Today, as fire and collapse scar its structure, it feels like watching a chapter of my own life get erased."

For 50-year-old Novera Shamim, Gul Plaza was an integral part of her life. She reminisced her wedding 25 years ago: the very first crockery set at her in-laws' house came from Gul Plaza. And she still has it.

Her love for artificial flowers drew her there monthly. "I would go there every month because there was incredible variety and quality," she stated. Just last week, she ordered Bougainvillea flowers from a shop called Fantazia. "They responded so promptly when I placed an order online, and it was delivered within three days."

Everything under one roof

What set Gul Plaza apart was its promise of completeness. It was that rare market space in Karachi where affordability,

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'KU land' remains occupied even after withdrawal of petrol pump NOC

Employees blame varsity administration for slow pace of action against private party constructing fuel station

By Waqas Ali Ranjha

KARACHI: Although the district administration has withdrawn the no-objection certificate (NOC) issued to a private party for the construction of a petrol pump on land claimed to be owned by Karachi University, the varsity has yet to regain possession of the site until the conclusion of litigation in its favour, it emerged on Tuesday.

As per the university administration, certain influential individuals had been attempting to illegally occupy the varsity land. The matter came to light last year, when the university announced legal action against the land grabbers and hired a professional law firm to deal with them. However, despite this, construction of a petrol pump on the university's land continued which is now ready for inauguration.

As the issue resurfaced last week, KU wrote letters to the Universities and Boards Department and other concerned departments, seeking intervention in the matter. Following this, the Universities and Boards Department approached the district administration. In a letter issued on January 19, it asked the East deputy commissioner to take immediate action against the alleged encroachment.

The letter stated that illegal encroachment on land belonging to the University of Karachi was ongoing. It named Awami Petrol Pump on Main University Road and Hafiz Petrol Pump near Khatam-i-Nabuwat Chowk, close to Kaneez Fatima Society, as unlawfully occupying university land.

A VIEW of the Silver Jubilee Gate of Karachi University.—White Star

After that letter, the city administration took action on the same day and cancelled the NOC for the said petrol pump issued to the private party.

A letter, issued by the East deputy commissioner on January 19, 2026, addressed the Zonal Manager (Channel Development) for Pakistan State Oil Company Limited. It says that "the NOC in respect of M/S Hafiz Petrol Pump at plot (Naclass) 01, Sector 22 Scheme 33 Deh & Tapo Gujro Taluka Gulistan-i-Iqbal District Karachi East issued earlier by this office … is hereby cancelled and withdrawn."

However, the varsity has yet to regain possession of its premises until the conclusion of litigation in its favour. A case in this regard is already with a legal firm and the KU administration maintains that the university will establish its ownership of the land in courts and other forums and reclaim the occupied sites.

KU officials have further said that the administration has also written to the Board of Revenue and other relevant departments, seeking verification of land documents and determination of their legal status.

However, the slow pace of action by the university's legal team as well as by the government department drew criticism. Kazim Javed, general secretary of the Neutral Employees Group at KU, questioned why the work on the petrol pump was allowed to continue and reach completion under the authorities' noses.

Similarly, a KU official said that the government was not taking the land grab matter seriously, which is why the illegal construction had continued. He said that unless the provincial authorities take strict action against all encroachers, such occupations will not be reversed.